

childbearing

The newsletter of the Lower Mainland Childbearing Society

Womb & Board

My grandmother used to joke that, for women in our family to get pregnant, all we had to do was hang a man's pants at the foot of the bed.

And indeed, in the history of the maternal side of my family there has been no shortage of "oops" third or fourth babies, or strangely large "premies" born seven or eight months after marriage.

But its not so easy for everyone. More and more families are relying on medical technology or the help of donors, and many others find conception difficult for no discernable reason. For every couple who was able to conceive readily and when planned, there are at least two others who have either had to struggle to achieve pregnancy, or become pregnant unexpectedly. And then there are those women who have been through the gamut of natural and medical aids, only to find they get pregnant after an all night whoop up when they've given up trying altogether.

All these varied roads to getting pregnant lead to an equal number of worries. What if the health conditions that led to difficulty conceiving also have implications for the baby? If donor sperm or eggs were used, what effect may that have on our children's health? The stress of difficult conceptions may lead us to feel our pregnancies are fragile, and we find ourselves unable to emotionally connect to our unborn babies for fear of loss. If the pregnancy was unplanned we may be concerned that our nutrition was not up to par, that our lifestyle was unhealthy, and most worryingly, that we were still drinking alcohol or smoking until we found out several weeks later.

Let me assure you, first of all, that human beings, from embryo to adult, are extremely resilient. So few babies are conceived and gestated under "perfect"



circumstances that, if perfection was required to grow a healthy human, we would have died out as a species long ago. The foetus has its own survival skills: when the mother's diet is less than optimal, the baby gets first cut of the nutrients; when oxygen is low (as in a smoky environment), baby has a nap, decreasing her oxygen requirements until the air is better; if the placenta is not doing well, the baby will speed up her own organ development to be born sooner. Even emotional stresses are used as an adaptive process by the foetus, as **Stephanie Ondrack** points out in our Question of the Quarter.

However, being human, we like to strive for perfection. So in this issue we've provided articles from several perinatal practioners who can give us advice in optimizing our and our babies' physical and emotional health before, during, and after conception. **Stephanie Peltz, ND**, takes a look at the pre-trimester of pregnancy and how naturopathy can help prepare for conception. **Jeda Boughton, DTCM**, discusses acupressure and acupuncture in the perinatal period; and **Mia Kalef, DC**, introduces us to the idea of a Conception Imprint, and how we might heal trauma associated with the beginnings of life. Finally we have advice on how to support your pregnant partner from 'other mother' **Robin Stone** and Dads' Corner columnist **Cameron Phillips**.

✉ **Jennifer Landels**, production editor

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- ~ Lily

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Postpartum Survival Guide

The Childbearing Society is: Aleksandra Henderson, *President*; Jennifer Landels, *Newsletter Production Editor*; Stephanie Ondrack, *Registrar, Secretary, Marketing Director, Newsletter Content Editor*; Susan Woodhouse, *Packages*; Molly Eitzen, *Treasurer*; Katy Thomson, *Breastfeeding Counsellor*; Kara Ko, *Volunteer Coordinator*; Diane Donaldson, *Past President*.

Instructors: Melina Auerbach, Molly Eitzen, Aleksandra Henderson, Stephanie Ondrack, Susan Woodhouse.

childbearing news

Yahoo!

The Childbearing Society's online discussion forum has moved over, from google to Yahoo. If you have not already done so, please join us there! It is a forum for discussing all topics relating to pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding, parenting, and family life. The forum is open to all current and past clients, teachers, and members. Just drop us a line at registration@childbearing.org, and we will send you a Yahoo invitation.



New Teacher

Congratulations to **Melina Auerbach** who has finished her apprenticeship with us. You can expect to see her teaching some of our **Breastfeeding Nights** and facilitating our **Breastfeeding Clinics** and **Postpartum Circles** in the near future. In addition, Melina works as a post partum doula specializing in breastfeeding support. She is trained by DONA International, has worked as a breastfeeding counsellor in the Netherlands and in Vancouver, and has a Master's in Public Health. Welcome Melina!

✎ Letters & Announcements ✎

We love to hear from you! Keep sending your comments on our newsletter, our classes, your birth and parenting experiences, and anything else related to the childbearing year that you'd like to get off your chest to: stephanie@childbearing.org

I just wanted to say thank-you for leading such fantastic classes. Every night we leave feeling more empowered and confident. I love the format and the information has been invaluable.

Definitely the best \$240 I have ever spent!!

Penny & David Elton



I really can't say enough about the amazing resource you have been. Signing up for our prenatal classes with you was the best thing we could have ever done.

Thank you for this! And I wish the organization much continued success. It's truly valuable.

Jennifer



Thank you so much for sharing your guidance, support and knowledge over the past few months. Paul and I have greatly enjoyed the prenatal class and continue to learn things every



Babies from the class of Autumn 2009, chillin' on the sofa

class! Your approach is sincerely appreciated and we love how you encourage us to challenge widely-held beliefs. You are helping to create a group of knowledgeable, critically-thinking and caring parents. It has been a pleasure participating in your class.

Thank you!

Kerry Parker-Smith



Your classes were awesome, awesome, awesome. We learned so much more than we expected, and we met great people. We still get together with most of the class. We tell everyone we know to

take your classes. They really changed the way we think about being parents. Thank you!

Gillian & Mark



Amazing! Childbearing did a fantastic job. Both my husband and I walked away exceptionally pleased with the amount of information and support we received. As the first weeks at home with our new baby unfolded, we really realized how prepared the classes had made us. We were confident, prepared and able to enjoy and not stress too much about the new addition to our family. THANK YOU!

Brandee

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Focus on:

Conception & the Foetus

The Pre-trimester of Pregnancy

by Stephanie Peltz

I bet you are thinking: I've never heard of a pre-trimester!

Well, it exists, and don't worry, it often goes unnoticed and forgotten.

The pre-trimester is what I call the one hundred days it takes for a woman's egg to mature, and the one hundred and sixteen days it takes to generate a man's sperm. This means there are up to four months that can influence ease of conception, birth outcomes, and the health of a baby for years to come. As a naturopathic physician, I encourage my patients to complete a preconception health program before they plan on conceiving.

The fertility statistics are concerning. One in six couples in North America is struggling to conceive. In my naturopathic practice I see fertility concerns relating to environmental and dietary toxicity, nutritional deficiency, increasing age of future parents, stress, infection, chronic ill health, and more. There is a great deal to offer these parents, however. As they say, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Preconception planning may not eliminate fertility challenges, but it can have a powerful impact on them.

This increase in fertility problems forces us to become more and more reliant on technology for solutions. I support these technologies; however, it is intuitive to me to improve health prior to attempting conception. Do we not till the soil before planting the seeds?

Pre-Conception Checklist

- Achieve a healthy body weight
- Chart your menstrual cycle and address irregularities
- Reduce stress
- Check any medications you take for safety during conception and pregnancy
- Quit smoking
- Address chronic ill health (including infections, musculoskeletal pain, etc.)
- Improve nutrition by eating 8 servings of fruit and vegetables daily
- Complete screening blood tests (iron stores, rubella titres, blood sugars, etc.)
- Start taking a prenatal multivitamin including at least 800 mg of folic acid
- Discuss feelings toward conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and parenthood with your partner or a friend.

All these things will increase your chances of conceiving a healthy baby. However, if your pregnancy was a surprise, and you didn't have a chance to make lifestyle changes, rest assured you are still most likely carrying a perfectly healthy infant. Making these changes at any point in your pregnancy will improve your and your baby's health.

Assisted reproductive techniques may be necessary but they fail to address underlying health issues. Naturopathic medicine acts as an excellent adjunct to these approaches. Many patients of the fertility clinics in the Lower Mainland also consult naturopathic physicians to complement their treatment. Naturopathic medicine truly shines in the field of prevention, which, in this case, is preconception health care. The same treatments that help women conceive also can reduce risks of miscarriage, foetal defects, and unhealthy children.

Preconception Health Care (PCHC) is a four month program designed to optimize the health of women and men wanting to conceive healthy babies. PCHC includes the least invasive treatments for healthy conception and has been researched to achieve significant improvements in conception rates and the overall health of successive generations. A study conducted in the UK by FORESIGHT showed greater than two times the conception rate for *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) preceded by PCHC.

Naturopathic PCHC is tailored specifically for each patient's unique needs. It involves nutritional counselling, some form of detoxification, stress management techniques, lifestyle coaching, the prescription of naturopathic remedies (including herbs, vitamins, and minerals), potentially traditional Chinese medicine including acupuncture, and fertility awareness through tracking menstrual cycles.

PCHC addresses a patient's chronic health concerns *in advance* of becoming pregnant. It identifies conditions and risk factors that contribute to adverse maternal and infant outcomes. Time is taken at this point to run screening lab tests to assess for infection, iron stores, rubella titres and the like. Often results indicate issues that require weeks or months to correct. As well, any medications (prescription and over the counter) are reviewed for safety in pregnancy.

The first trimester of pregnancy is vital to the initial growth and cell, organ, and system development of a baby. Engaging in a PCHC program can ensure that all the building blocks are present for conception and for the formation of a healthy foetus. As well, it is designed to ensure the *absence* of all the factors detrimental to fertility and development.

I encourage patients not to wait until there are problems before addressing health issues. If you are planning to conceive and you want to have a positive impact on your birth outcome and the health of your child, consider a pre-trimester health kick and engage in a preconception health plan.

✎ **Dr. Stephanie Peltz, BSc, ND** has a family naturopathic practice located in the Yaletown area. She has a special focus on women in the perinatal period, and finds this invariably leads to treating the whole family (including both children and men). Dr. Stephanie is currently accepting new patients. For more information go to www.drmpeltz.com



Acupuncture and Acupressure in Pregnancy and Labour

by Jeda Boughton

Pregnancy is an exciting life event, however it can be physically and emotionally challenging as your growing baby puts intense demands on your body. For over two thousand years, women have turned to acupuncture and acupressure for pregnancy related conditions.

Acupuncture

Acupuncture is the use of tiny needles on specific points to stimulate and to rebalance your body's Qi (Energy). The points lie on meridians, which are a series of channels that carry energy. Each point prompts your body to work more efficiently.

Acupuncture is a safe, effective form of treatment offering drug-free relief from problems associated with pregnancy. It helps prevent those problems from becoming serious enough to require medical treatment. The use of acupuncture assists your internal organs to function at their best, which promotes a harmonious balance between the yin and yang forces in your body. Regular treatments ensure that both you and your baby stay comfortable and healthy.

Acupuncture is effectively used for treating many pregnancy-related problems, including:

- Morning Sickness
- Threatened miscarriage
- Heartburn
- Fatigue
- Constipation & Haemorrhoids
- Back Pain and Sciatica
- Joint Pain
- Choleostasis
- Itching
- Anaemia
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Gestational diabetes
- Bladder infections
- High blood pressure
- Oedema
- Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Breech Presentation
- Rhinitis
- Premature labour
- Ripening the cervix for inducing labour

In early pregnancy, treatments are given to prevent miscarriage and to address symptoms such as nausea and fatigue. During the second trimester the aim is to maintain

balance and offer relief from symptoms including heartburn, constipation and haemorrhoids. Acupuncture is used during the third trimester for breech presentation and subsequently for labour induction to prepare your body for a smooth labour. At term, acupuncture ripens the cervix and promotes an efficient delivery. Acupuncture and acupressure are used during labour to relieve pain and relax both you and baby. Studies have shown that women who received acupuncture once a week during the last month of pregnancy had significantly shorter labour and delivery. Once your baby arrives, continued treatment speeds recovery, increases your strength and promotes lactation.

Acupressure

Acupressure is the use of the same meridian system using pressure rather than needles. It is a great way to encourage a natural labour with close partner involvement. Acupressure is also non-invasive, safe, and you can do it yourself. For example, points on the wrists are used for nausea, for pain there are points on the back and hands, and to help the baby descend we use pressure points on the shoulders. These points can be stimulated using the fingers, knuckles, elbows and even the knees.

Patients report that using acupressure provides a huge reduction in pain during contractions, benefiting the delivery as well as creating an overall sense of calm. A licensed acupuncturist experienced in obstetrics and gynaecology can instruct clients on pressure points they can use during pregnancy, birth and postpartum.

Dr. Jeda Boughton is a Doctor of Traditional Chinese Medicine and director of BodaHealth in Vancouver, B.C. she has completed extensive post-graduate training in obstetrics. She has a wide range of experience with women through pre conception and through to delivery. www.bodahealth.ca 604-733-2632





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Dads' Corner

Ten Things Future Dads Should Know About Pregnancy

By Cameron Phillips

[This is an excerpt from Cameron Phillips' blog for fathers, www.adadsheart.blogspot.com]

1. Pregnancy is a HUGE deal for your wife.

While you may from time to time forget your wife is pregnant, your wife does not. She is changing physically, mentally and hormonally. Dads need to be involved as possible: go to medical appointments, rub cream on her belly, talk to the baby, ask her questions regularly about how she's feeling. When you are exhausted, try to remember that she is probably even more so. And when the enthusiasm is waning, fake it.

2. She will still (most likely) want to have sex.

While the thought of getting it on won't likely cross her mind while her head is in the toilet, hopefully her nausea will be short-lived. Many women actually report an increased libido at various times during pregnancy. Some guys feel weird about having sex, "when my kid is in there." Sex with your partner when she's pregnant is completely safe and normal. You aren't going to poke your kid in they eye and you aren't going to hurt him. Talk to your mid-wife or obstetrician about it if you are worried. Sex is an important part of any relationship—it still can be during pregnancy. It can also be reassuring to your wife when she is as big as a house that you still think she's beautiful.

3. Find someone else to whom you can complain.

If your wife has been barfing all day, peeing all night or watching her body transform into a dirigible, she doesn't want to see you feeling hard done by about taking out the trash. You surely have some legitimate gripes that we all have from day-to-day; you just aren't likely to get much sympathy from your wife when her feet look like float plane pontoons. Find a buddy or even a counsellor on whom you can unload if you can't keep it to yourself.

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On the Same Side

Moms Helping their Female Partners through Pregnancy

By Robin Stone

All of the points discussed by Cameron Phillips directed at soon-to-be dads on how to support your partner through pregnancy are true if you are a woman (or woman identified person). Though harder to admit as a lesbian, even the 'embrace your inner cave man' resonated with me. I remember many times feeling very protective around my partner while she was pregnant. So, all of you ladies who love ladies who are starting families, the advice to the Dads should be taken to heart as well.

I would like to add a few additional points of advice on how to support your pregnant partner, relevant to both men and women.

1. Start taking on as many household duties as you can can.

If you are not already the primary chef, house cleaner, and handyperson around the house, start now. Your partner will really appreciate the extra effort, and it is good practice for when your little one arrives. Being home with a baby all day is extremely hard and tiring work. Yes, you will be tired from your day, and doing all the house duties will be hard work for you too (especially if you don't already cook), however it will make a world of difference to your partner whilst pregnant and afterwards. If your partner is planning to stay at home with your newborn, do not assume that she has all the time (or energy) in the world to cook and clean. This is one of the most straight-forward, yet crucial ways to support your partner and family.

2. Discuss your birth plan and prepare for it.

Talk to your partner about how she plans to give birth and what role she sees you in her birth experience. If you do not know much about birth, learn. Read some books, especially ones relating to the type of experience your partner is expecting. You can also take a class, or watch some videos. You want to support her through her labour as best as possible. Being well informed and knowing what she wants form the best foundation to begin from. Also do the groundwork for the labour she hopes for. For example, if she wants a home water birth, make sure you rent a birth pool!

3. Give her as much opportunity as possible to do self-care.

Most people do not take enough care of themselves. Our culture has an unwritten rule that self care is selfish, and selfishness is only ever bad. However, your partner is about to embark on the selfless path of motherhood, and having a few months of supported self-care will be amazing to her. Make it easy for her to do what she needs physically, mentally and emotionally every day if possible, whether it is writing, meditation, swimming, yoga, or long walks in the woods. Facilitate her nurturing her body. It will make her stronger for the marathon of labour and the sleep-deprived months that follow.

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4. Sympathy pounds do happen.

God knows why, but as women put on the pounds during pregnancy, men often do, too. Don't let this happen to you. Try to keep (or get fit) when she is pregnant. You are going to need a lot of energy when your little one comes — especially in those first few crazy, early sleep deprived days.

5. Trust her intuition.

No, I'm not talking about who is going to win game four of the Western Conference Finals - I'm talking about her body. Your wife is experiencing things that she has never gone through before. If she is concerned about how she, or more importantly, the baby is doing, suggest going to the doctor or calling the clinic. You can't lose here. You are being caring and supporting and putting your family first, even if everything is "perfectly normal." Trying to reassure her that everything is fine or telling her that she is just imagining things won't get you any brownie points.

6. Be the protector.

Embrace the cave man within. Tell strangers who try to rub her belly to back off. Ask sick would-be visitors to stay at home until they are healthy. Halt women who are about to tell their "labour horror story" (and they do love to tell them) and ask them not to continue if it entails accounts of 36 hours of pushing, forceps and a caesarean. Your partner will find this endearing (as long as you don't punch someone's lights out) and you get to swell your chest a little, too.

7. Ask questions.

Ask your wife how she's doing. Ask other dads about their experience. Ask other moms, too. Read books. Ask questions at medical appointments. Ask. Ask. Ask.

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4. Nurture your relationship.

Having children is probably one of the most challenging things that can happen to a couple. Make a conscious effort to embrace all the wonderful reasons you are together as a couple before your little one arrives. Go on a lot of dates. Do activities that you love, but may not be appropriate for new babies, like the theatre, fancy restaurants, kayaking, or back country camping, (just to name a few!). Be compassionate to one another, and spend a lot of quality 'adult-only' time. You may need the sweet memories to get you through the following year.

I would also like to address some of the queer-specific issues that soon-to-be queer moms should be aware of.

1. The definition of "Mother" is huge.

Just because you are a woman, does not mean you can step directly into the role of mother. A lot of people imposed that assumption upon me: "oh, this will be easy for your partner because you are both women". Wrong! There is something very primitive and biological that happens between a birth mother and her baby, which is accentuated even more by breastfeeding. Take some time to think about the different ways you can bond as a mother with your child. Also recognize that your relationship to your child will be different than that of your child to your partner. The title alone does not determine the relationship.

2. Your new role is unique.

Let's be honest, there are not a ton of non-biological gay mothers out there. Your role is more challenging to fulfil than soon-to-be-Dad's because you do not have a well defined set of social standards to follow about what is right or how to behave. The support systems for gay parents are lacking or non-existent. Many situations surrounding the very hetero-normative world of pregnancy may be quite awkward. For example, at your prenatal class during a break-off group would you feel more comfortable with the pregnant moms talking about labour fears and breastfeeding, or going with the men to talk about sex and financial support? You may not feel that you really fit in either category. You have to just go with your gut, and do what feels right. Speak out when you are being further marginalized. (i.e. the use of language such as "husband" instead of partner, or "dad" instead of parent). You have just as much right to your experience as a new parent as anyone else.

3. Talk to your family and friends about language.

You need to have very detailed discussions with your family and friends about how you expect your family to be defined. Sometimes this discussion will bring up many other questions about your process as queer parents, and other times people just really do not know what to say, and they are glad you are talking to

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8. Don't let the hormones get to you.

It's a pretty safe bet that at some point, that wonderful cocktail of hormones which are concocting the perfect home for your growing baby will also have some pretty trippy affects on your wife. This isn't to diminish her feelings, nor is it an excuse to get you off the hook if you are being a dud of a husband. This is simply to warn you not to take things too personally if the hormones do turn your wife into some B horror film character.

9. Make a big deal of pregnancy number two.

People make a huge fuss over you when you are expecting the first time. They say "congratulations" the second time and then get back to whatever they were doing. This pregnancy is no less magical for your wife, however. Try not to slip into "been there, done that" mode. Even if others fail to recognize the significance you must give it the same attention it deserves.

10. Open up.

Many men I've spoken to say they feel responsible for any pain or suffering their partner can go through during labour. But how many of their partners know that? Just as your wife will experience things you can't possibly imagine, you will have feelings and concerns that aren't on her radar. Share them. While point #3 suggests you can't do this, you can. Just be diplomatic. "Honey, I know that you are the one who carries and delivers our baby, but when you are up to it, I have some concerns I'd like to talk about, too."

☞ Shortly after the birth of his first son, **Cameron Phillips** lost his job. He confronted head-on the old idea that it is a man's number one duty to be the financial provider in the family. Out of this struggle, Cameron founded "A Dad's Heart"— a company designed to teach men better work/life balance skills.



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them to relieve any awkwardness they may feel. Perhaps you conceived using a donor who plans to not be involved as a parent: your family should know that he is not to be called "Dad", but should be called by his name or as "donor" in relation to your family. Likewise, if you are co-parenting with another couple, perhaps the term "Dad" is being used. It is important that your family be respected, and language is one of the strongest ways to achieve this.

4. Sort out legal matters before the baby arrives.

If you are doing a second parent-adoption or declaration of parentage (which I strongly recommend), talk to your lawyer before the baby comes, to legally secure your position as a parent and remove any legal onus on your donor. Nothing can move legally until the baby is born, but it is a good idea to have everything all ready to go before the birth. Babies bring a lot of chaos with them, and it's nice to have some of the more complicated things run as smoothly as possible.

5. Create personal space.

Most people do not know many queer couples that are pregnant, or have strong opinions about gay people having babies. Sometimes, this invokes inappropriate comments or questions, even from strangers. For example, many people asked us "what did you do to get pregnant?", which is, quite frankly no one's business but ours. To put it into perspective, you would never ask a straight couple, "What position did you use to conceive?" How will you create your personal space? You can tell people that what they are asking is too personal, or you can respond to people's questions with humour, or with education. However you plan to deal with the undoubtedly high number of questions or comments, just make sure you take care of your emotional self, as it can be tiring and upsetting at times.

Useful resources.

There are so many challenging and unique situations about becoming a queer parent. We do not have the luxury of an accidental pregnancy, but we have the privilege of consciously chosen children. The book *The New Essential Guide to Lesbian Conception, Pregnancy, and Birth* by Stephanie Brill is an excellent resource for queer parents and has a lot of great advice. For those in the lower mainland, Pomegranate Community Midwives hosts a queer parents' information series called "Swelling with Pride". The sessions are full of information and other queer parents-to-be; I highly recommend them. The

most recent series is happening this spring. There is also a Swelling with Pride listserve that can be found on the Pomegranate website. (www.pomegranate-midwives.com).



☞ **Robin Stone** is a proud mother of Marten, born at home in June 2009 and loving partner for the past 7 years to her beautiful fiancée, Astrid. She currently is living in Comox, BC and is a stay-at-home mother.

The Conception Field

by Mia Kalef

Song of the Spirit

There is a tribe in East Africa where true intimacy is fostered even before birth. In this tribe, the birth date of a Child is not counted from the day of its physical birth or even the day of conception, as in other village cultures. For this tribe, the birth date is set the first time the Child is thought of in its Mother's mind. Aware of her intention to conceive a Child with a particular Father, the Mother then goes off to sit alone under a tree. There she sits and listens until she can hear the song of the Child that she hopes to conceive. Once she has heard it, she returns to her village and teaches it to the Father so that they can sing it together as they make love, inviting the Child to join them. After the Child is conceived, she sings the song to the Baby in her womb. She then teaches it to the old women and midwives of the village so that throughout the labour and the miraculous moment of birth, the Child is greeted with its song. After birth, all the villagers learn the song of their new member and sing it to the Child when she falls and hurts herself. It is sung in times of triumph, in rituals, and initiations. This song becomes a part of the marriage ceremony when the Child is grown, and at the end of life, his or her loved ones will gather around the deathbed and sing this song for the last time.

—Jack Kornfield¹

Think deeply about what your ideal welcoming might have been when you were conceived. You will not remember what the conditions of your conception were, but everyone carries a resonant echo of the conditions of their conception.

How would you have liked your parents to be relating? What would you have liked to hear as you first entered the form that has become you? Babies form beliefs about themselves after receiving cues from their parents and the world around them right from the beginning. Am I welcome? Who is here to notice me? Can I feel the willingness between those who I am joining? Is my Mother ready? How about my Father? What are their motivations for having me?

These early rhythms, which resonate in what I call the **conception field**, may have affected you as fertilization took place and while your cells developed. Think of the conception field as a landscape the river of your being flows through as it comes down the mountain. You, the water, will flow wherever gravity takes you. The landscape guides you and helps establish your shape; the form through which your essential nature will be expressed. Over time, your presence shapes the landscape, and the landscape continues to shape your form. Maybe the messages you get from your landscape naturally support how

you, the water want to flow. Maybe you alter your natural flow so you can accommodate the landscape. Most likely a bit of both are true.


Think of conception as a form of birth, of coming from one side to another, of changing from formlessness to form. Even before you have the words to communicate or ears to hear with, you sense yourself and who and what are around you. You sense the fields around you.

Why would you be so sensitive to the world this early? Does science recognize this fact? Since you only have nine months to prepare your body to survive outside your mother's body, the earlier you can integrate information about what to expect from that outside world, the better. Babies, right from the beginning, are pre-empting the environment by taking cues from their mother's bloodstreams, sounds, lights, and also from electrical information. There is eighty years of scientific inquiry behind this study, which can be found in the fields of psychology², embryology³, physics, and medicine.

Conception Consciousness

A child has come into the world once she is conceived. Now begins a miraculous journey. In the space of one month, a child will transform from two cells into a being with every one of its

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systems in place. He or she will have a heart, a nervous system, a digestive tract, and the beginnings of all of its organs. And somewhere near the end of that month, he or she will be discovered. Many people do not realize they are pregnant and that quietly, under their noses, a soul is inhabiting his or her new body, laying foundations for how they will move through life.

If you were a developing embryo again, finding the first impulses of life pulsing through your very delicate nervous system and discovering the ecstasy of your heart beginning to pump, how would you have wanted to feel while it was happening? Whom would you have wanted to be holding you, watching you, loving you? How could it have been? Maybe you did get what you wanted. Maybe your mother and father spoke to you during that precious first few hours and days, only guessing that you were there, and you felt loved because you could feel their attention. Maybe you could feel that your existence mattered to someone right from the beginning because you were touched even before you had skin. What diet would you have wished for your mother? What kind of love would you have wished for her, not from you, but from others that were there to support her as she supported you? What a miracle you are, growing and discovering your heart, what will become your brain, your spine, and all your muscles. Wish for the baby coming into being that he or she takes the highest levels of love and nutrition into their rapidly growing cells. Wish for them to organize their axes around these gifts.

Healing Conception Imprints

But what if conditions during conception were not optimal? What if your baby is left with a negative conception imprint? Even without a trained perinatal therapist, it is possible to begin to dissolve the impact the imprint has on your baby. Your most important tools are pace and compassion. Your baby speaks and listens at a rate that is eight times slower than yours. Slow down your attention to the pace of 1:8. Slow your movements and your breathing and bring your attention to the slow, still space between you. You've now tuned to the shared frequency you have with your child. It is not different from the one you feel if you have breastfed, or have ever rested with a child or baby. Consider if you feel guilt, or sadness, or concern that you have hurt your child, and recognize your feelings to be your own and not your child's. Give yourself compassion.

Differentiate what you are going through

Question of the Quarter:

Q: *I am pregnant and have a very stressful job. Will this affect my baby?*

A: Stress can indeed affect your baby in the womb. And there are things you can do to protect your baby from stress.

Stress is a normal part of our lives. Even if we tried, there is no way we could avoid experiencing any stress during pregnancy. And nor should we! Some stress is actually educational for baby.

When we experience an emotion, we produce that emotion in chemical form. For stress, we produce stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These chemicals cross the placenta and infuse our baby, who experiences the emotion too.

Since stress is not usually constant, it is often followed by relief or peace, which is likewise expressed in our bodies hormonally, and likewise travels to baby. So by experiencing a full range of human emotions, babies learn that frightening storms of anger, and desolate wells of sadness, do not last forever, and are in fact succeeded by periods of calm, periods of contentment, and periods of joy. Thus, babies learn the flavour of their emotional environment before they emerge into it. Perhaps this helps to explain our mood swings when pregnant?

However, lots and lots of stress can be detrimental to baby, if it is not punctuated by sufficient recovery periods of happier emotions. In this case, baby's growing brain will condition itself to be born into a time of turbulence (like war, or famine), based on the impression that extra-uterine life must be constant stress.

Before anyone starts feeling guilty, it takes **a lot** of stress for this to happen. And if that describes your life, there are things you can do to protect your baby from the effects of stress. And it is never too late.

The first is, quite simply, to provide your baby with periods of calm. If you spend fifteen minutes each day doing a conscious relaxation exercise, you will be sending your baby relaxing, love-filled hormones, that will help soften his or her response to stress. Before you fall asleep each night, place your hands on your belly, relax your body in small sections (first feet, then legs, then back, etc), allow your breathing to slow down, and visualize your hands sending calming, relaxing energy to your baby. You can do this in the morning too, before getting out of bed. You can take five minutes in the middle of the day. The more you use conscious relaxation, the better it works, and the more baby benefits. You can also take a yoga class, or meditation class.

The second is to explain things to your baby. Place your hands on your belly, and speak out loud. Let baby know: something stressful is going on, but it's **not about you**, and I am taking care of it. Differentiating (assuring baby that it's not about him or her) allows baby to avoid taking it personally. Letting baby know that you, the parent, are on top of the situation, prevents baby from taking on the burden.

Does this sound far fetched? How can foetuses possibly understand these concepts? Well, they can't entirely, but they are nonetheless very definitely affected by the chemicals they receive during these mother-to-baby conversations. Since the solution is so simple, and so harmless, I recommend trying it. And even if you'll never know what kind of difference it made to your baby, you deserve the treat of lower stress hormones as well.

✎ Stephanie Ondrack

For more information see:

Verny, Thomas MD, *Pre-Parenting; Nurturing Your Child from Conception.*

Chamberlain, David, *The Mind of Your Newborn Baby.*

Kalef, Dr Mia, *The Secret Life of Babies.*

Wirth, Frederick, *Prenatal Parenting; The Complete Psychological Guide to Loving Your Unborn Child.*

and call it your own. For example:

"You know sweetheart, I'm not sure if I have it just right, but I'm thinking you remember when you first came to be here between us. Although I did not know that you were coming, I now am so glad you are here. I feel sadness and it's my sadness (or another feeling); you don't have to take it on. I am taking care of myself and I am all right. I just need to feel this feeling. I am so sorry that you missed this very important time. I want you to know that you can tell me about it anytime and I will be here to listen. You are so welcome here and so wanted. I can see how you're telling me by the way you are moving. I am listening."

Even if you're still learning to trust what you're seeing, a baby will notice that you are speaking directly into the heart of her experience. A baby, no matter his or her age or stage of development, will give you a sign to show you "I feel understood." She will show you by changing what she is doing. She will look right at you and will focus on you. Sometimes, when you've really acknowledged a hurt a child has faced, she may break into very strong tears. This is the baby telling you what the underlying emotion of the experience was like for her. Continue to talk to her with compassion and curiosity. Don't try to shush her; encourage her to tell you, that you are listening, that you are sorry. Tell her that you are here and she doesn't have to do it alone this time. If you feel yourself going into your own emotional response, such as sadness or guilt, remember that it is your job to "hold a space" for your child, not for your child to "hold a space" for you. If you notice this happening, it is possible that someone did not hold a space for you when you were a baby. It is common that parents don't catch themselves projecting their own unrequited response from childhood and react with strong emotions in the face of their children's emotions. If this is the case, remind yourself that there will be time for you to get the support you need. But this is not that time.

Continue to let your touch be gentle. Conception touch has the depth likened to what it feels like to give attention to a person. Give gentle attention along with gentle touch. Stroke your Baby's head and back. This helps them reorganize their nervous systems around the new axis.

Children are conceived under a huge range of circumstances, and in a variety of ways. Rather than judge the story of your own baby's conception, you can direct your energy towards healing any possible effects. Even if you are not sure whether your child has a conception imprint, it never hurts to tell a child that they are wanted or to speak honestly and compassionately about the circumstances of her conception.

✎ Author of the book *The Secret Life of Babies*, **Dr Mia Kalef** is a chiropractor, craniosacral therapist, and founder of *Emerging Families*, a company built on a vision of a peaceful, compassionate world that begins with treating our children in this way. For more information, see www.emergingfamilies.com.



¹Kornfield, J., *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. Bantam, New York, NY: 1996.

²The Journal of Pre-and Perinatal Psychology, <http://www.birthpsychology.com/journal/>

³Seifriz, W., 1954. *Seifriz on Protoplasm*.

Birth Stories

Beautiful New Life: Lily's Birth

by Jill Scott

Four days past my due date, I lay in bed having a restless nap. For the past four months I had been praying that my baby would be late. We found ourselves in the middle of a complete house renovation and nowhere to live quite unintentionally. After a few months of couch surfing, we came to the reality that our house would not be habitable before the baby came and we rented an apartment.

Lying in bed I heard my friend's voice when she told me, "Jill, at some point you're going to have to decide it is time for this baby to come out!" I sat up suddenly realizing that that time was now. I grabbed my pad of paper and a pen and wrote out nineteen intentions for the birth of my baby. Some of these were to have a fast labour, to remember to relax, for my tissues not to tear, to have very little bleeding, to trust my body, to trust my baby, to trust my midwife and support people, to get a room in the hospital with a tub, for my baby to latch on after birth, and for the baby to be healthy with little trauma. I packed my hospital bag and gathered up all the items I wanted for labour. As I settled back in bed, I let the baby

know that NOW I was ready and excited to meet him or her.

It is not too surprising that twelve hours later at 4:00 in the morning, I woke up with a cramping sensation in my abdomen. At first I thought it was just the Greek food I had for dinner the night before. But after watching the clock it became obvious that these 'gas' pains were every 10 minutes. I knew that it was a good idea to eat early in labour so in case it was labour, at 4:30 in the morning I ate some oatmeal in the dark. I crept back to bed and slept off and on until 7. My husband, Patrick, had planned on taking our very energetic dog for a run that morning and I encouraged him to go, cell phone in hand, so I could sleep as much as possible.



childbearing

contractions as I lay on my side in our bed. I scanned my body to make sure I wasn't wasting any energy with a tight muscle. I also reminded myself to loosen my jaw. I had learned that relaxing the jaw helps to soften and relax the cervix. With every contraction, I visualized my cervix opening. I worked hard to not be fearful of the pain, and to remember that my body knew how to go through labour and I needed to remain calm and relaxed so that my muscles could do this amazing job of moving a baby out of my body. I also reminded myself to make low noises instead of high fearful noises. I found it easier to stay relaxed with low noises and easier to get scared and frantic if I let myself make high pitched noises. Several times, someone would tell me I was

Jill & newborn Lily Grace

By 10:30, I was convinced that the 'gas' pains really were labour and we headed out for a walk to the coffee shop. I could talk and continue walking through the contractions but I became more aware of a growing sensation in my abdomen that was different than anything I had ever felt before. I stood up and paced the sidewalk in front of the coffee shop every 10 minutes as I felt better walking through the contractions. My mom joined us at noon and she watched with a fascinated amusement. Times had certainly changed since she had laboured over thirty years ago, when she rushed to the hospital at the first signs of labour. She was even a little shocked when I suggested that next we go grocery shopping. I wanted to make sure I had fresh fruit, juice, and bread for labour. While in the grocery store, I suddenly had an overwhelming urge to go home.

Once at home, I tried to eat some soup but as my contractions started coming closer together, I would barely sit down to start eating and would need to get up and walk through the contraction. I liked having someone to walk with me to lean on and squeeze their hand. Patrick and my mom took turns being that support person. I was now at the stage that I didn't want to talk anymore and needed all my concentration and efforts to be focused inside. My midwife arrived at 3:30 and was surprised to find I was already 5 cm dilated.

At this point in labour, I closed my eyes and didn't open them again until after labour was over. My brain seemed to shut down certain unneeded areas so that I could use all the energy in my body for this amazing transformation going on inside. I concentrated very deeply on relaxing between

doing a great job and would rub my back gently and lovingly and that helped me tremendously to have the energy and determination to keep going.

At 5:15, after another check the midwife she told me it was time to go to the hospital. My intention throughout pregnancy was to have a home birth. Without our home, I was wrestling with the idea of giving birth in the apartment we had rented. However, a haematologist who reviewed my history decided that I needed to be in the hospital in order to receive an IV after birth. However, at this point, I didn't want to move. I was starting to feel overwhelmed with contractions and I didn't want to use energy to get dressed and walk to the car. To Patrick's shock, our midwife told him she would drive ahead to get the paperwork started. "If I was at all worried that she wouldn't make it, I would follow right behind you in the car," I heard her tell him.

With the help of Patrick and my mom, we did make it to the car just as I felt a very strong sensation to push. Patrick waved the midwife down just as she was pulling away and she came back to check me again. "You have loads of time," she reassured me. "Drive fast. Very fast," she whispered to Patrick as she walked past the driver's window. Patrick put his foot on the gas and didn't let up until we skidded into a parking spot at Women's. As we lingered in the lobby filling out paperwork, I was longing to be in the room in the tub. "I need to push!" I yelled out and within a minute we were whisked into our room.

The moment I was in the tub, I felt my body relax. My breathing became very slow and regular and I felt my body slip deep in trance. I knew I was in the final stretch and very

soon I would be holding my baby. This gave me the energy and resolve I needed for the final phase. Our midwife would check the baby's heart beat every other contraction. Otherwise, my mom, Patrick and I were left alone to work through the last part of labour. My mom held me under my arms and Patrick held my hand.

About 30 minutes after getting in the tub, I started feeling a burning sensation when I pushed. "If you want to catch your baby, Patrick, get ready," our midwife said. With the next push, I felt an incredible relief from the pressure as our baby slid out into the water at 6:34pm. Patrick pulled her up and as she took her first breath, she let out a beautiful cry. My eyes opened and I felt transported back instantly. I felt a rush of energy, relief, and disbelief that the tiny baby on my chest was my baby girl.



Labour was the most unique experience in that the hard 'work' was to allow my body to do what it knew without getting in the way with tension and fear. I trusted that I was born with the wisdom of how to birth a baby built into my body.

Four hours after checking into the hospital, we were back home enveloped in the wonder and love of the process that led to us to holding a beautiful new life in our arms.

✂ *Jill Scott*

Business Directory

Baby, Child & Maternity Gear

Birthing Buddies Childbirth Services

604-928-2334
www.birthingbuddies.com

Bumbini Cloth Diaper Company

604-566-4125 / 1-877-566-4125
www.bumbini.ca

Little Earth

778-737-7004
www.littleearthvancouver.com

New & Green Baby Company

604-323-4145
www.newandgreen.com

Room For Two Baby & Maternity

1409 Commercial Drive, Vancouver
604-255-0508

Wee Ones Reruns

604-708-0956
weeonesreruns@shaw.ca

You Pillows, Mother/Baby Support

604-808-6945
info@youpillows.com

Fitness

Peltz, Stephanie, ND, Yoga Instructor

778-991-2084
www.drpeltz.com

Yoga on 7th

156 East 7th Avenue
604-879-YOGA

Yoga West of Vancouver

2662 W 4th Ave
604-732-9642

Health Care

Abrams, Carlyne, Family Osteopath

604-730-5950
info@vancouverosteopathy.net

Aurora Massage Therapy

210 – 2233 Burrard, Vancouver
604-734-4030

Boda Health

604-733-2632
www.bodahealth.ca

Evolve Nurturing Vitality

604-255-7777
www.evolvevitality.com

Kalef, Dr Mia, Craniosacral Therapist

604-908-1214
www.emergingfamilies.com

Peltz, Dr Stephanie, ND, Doula

778-991-2084
www.drpeltz.com

Soma Studio Massage

213 / 303, 1529 W 6th Ave, Vancouver
604-738-1502

Yaletown Chiropractic

604-688-5437
www.bonnchiropractic.com

Parenting

Mamaspeak
604.266.8124
meralon@mamaspeak.com

Community Resources

Information and Counselling

BCW Breastfeeding Clinic 604-875-2424
BCW Lactation Consultants 604-875-2282
Breast Milk Bank 604-875-2345 Ext 7607
Dial-a-Dietician 604-732-9191
Family Place (Westside) 604-738-2819
Family Place (Eastside) 604-255-9841
www.eastsidefamilyplace.org

Family Services of Vancouver

1616 West 7th Ave 604-731-4951
202-1193 Kingsway 604-874-2938

Infant and Child Seat Information

BCAA Consumer Service 604-298-2122
604-298-2755

Safe Start Programme

604-875-3458
ICAN Vancouver 604-734-4226
Post Caesarean Birth Support 604-433-5827
La Leche League 604-520-4623
www.LLCC.ca

Newborn Hotline

604-737-3737
Pacific Postpartum Support 604-255-7999
Parents in Crisis Line 604-669-1616

Support for Grieving Parents

BC Children's Social Work 604-875-2345 Ext 7358
BC Women's Social Work 604-875-2424
Ext 6161

Twins and More Club

www.vancouvertwins.com
Volunteer Grandparents Assn. 604-736-8271
Westcoast Family Resource 604-255-9568

Prenatal Classes

Lower Mainland Childbearing 604-878-1031

Doula Referrals

Doula Services Association 604-515-5588

Vancouver Coastal Health

Vancouver Health Department 604-875-6381
Evergreen Health Centre 604-872-2511
North Community Health Office 604-253-3575
Pacific Spirit Health Centre 604-261-6366
Raven Song Health Centre 604-709-6400
South Health Office 604-321-6151
Three Bridges Health Centre 604-736-9844

Note: Your Community Health Nurse has further information on local resource

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